critical digest

VOL. IV No. 37 May 12, 1952

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Tovarich-City Center, 5/14/52. New York City Theatre Company second limited run production of spring season presents revival of Jacques Deval's comedy, adapted by Robert E. Sherwood. Uta Hagen and Herbert Berghof star, Harry Horner directed...The Conscience-Booth, 5/15/52. Shubert Brothers in association with Joseph Kipness and Jack Small present Maurice Schwartz in one man show in English. A.M.Klein's adaptation of Portuguese play Hands of Eurydice...New Faces of 1952-Royale, 5/16/52. Leonard Sillman's new musical revue, staged and designed by John Murray Anderson, and presenting almost 20 newcomers.

Digests of Current Reviews

Of Thee I Sing-Ziegfeld, 5/5/52. Slim majority of daily critics approved Chandler Cowles and Ben Segal revival of the 1931 Pulitzer Prize musical by Kaufman-Ryskind and the Gershwins. Times, News, Mirror, reviewers raved, calling present production starring Jack Carson and Paul Hartman just as hilarious and witty as the original. Post, Eagle and Wall Street Journal appraisers marked their votes "pro" but felt that much of the satire on politics had dated. Herald Tribune, Journal American and Women's Wear critics thought all the material had dated. McClain, Journal American, in addition felt most of the production was miscast. While Kerr, Herald Tribune, feared that overture was best part of evening. Dash, Women's Wear, decided that the inserted slides were the wittiest part of the evening. Chapman, News, admitted he had seen original production 13 times. Current version is a little dimmer because it isn't as funny as Washington itself is today, News reviewer commented. Atkinson, Times, tabbed it as pertinent musical burlesque.

The Male Animal-City Center, 4/30/52. Unanimous approval of NYC Theatre Company's first spring production continued by weekly critics who agree with their daily colleagues that revival of Thurber-Nugent 1940 comedy drama is a minor American classic. Variety, Billboard, New Yorker, Cue and Christian Science Monitor aisle sitters also agreed that cast headed by Elliott Nugent, Martha Scott and Robert Preston was just about perfect. The plea for freedom of thought seems more vital today than it did originally, most pointed out. Each also expressed hope that limited run will be extended, or that show could be moved to another house.

Much Ado About Nothing-Music Box, 5/1/52 and The Victim-President, 5/2/52. Both closed Saturday 5/3/52 after receiving almost unanimous pannings from the daily critics. Former presented by Luther Greene and Jerry Tishman, and starring Claire Luce and Anthony Eustrel in the roles they play at Stratford-on-Avon last year was criticized for being a mere reading of one of Shakespeare's weakest plays. Chapman, summed up this point of view when he suggested the author needed more work on his script. Only McClain, Journal American, had kind words in recommending it for Shakespeare fans. "Weak melodrama" was term most used in panning Leonard Lesley's The Victim, second production by Heilwell and Winter-Berger at the small 48th Street theatre. Diverse views reported on acting. Cast was headed by Elliott Sullivan and Lloyd Gough. Watts, Post, filed a mild "pro."

News & Notes

Shows that closed include Hook 'N Ladder, Much Ado About Nothing, The Victim, To Be Continued, The Chase...John Golden to sponsor extended run of The Male Animal...

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' Cumulative NYC Ratings '

D - Daily W - Weekly M * Monthly B - Broadcast

DT - NY Times	DJC - Journal of Commerce	WCM - Chr. Science Monitor
DH - NY Herald Tribune	DWJ - Wall St. Journal	WC - Commonweal
DN - NY News	DWW - Women's Wear	WCU - Cue
DM - NY Mirror	WB - Billboard	WN - Nation
DC - NY Compass	WV - Variety	WNR - New Republic
DP - NY Post	WCD - Critical Digest	WNS - Newsweek
DJ - NY Journal American	WGN - George Jean Nathan	WNY - New Yorker
DW - NY World Tele-Sun	WWM - Ward Morehouse	WSR - Saturday Review
DB - Brooklyn Eagle	BC - WCBS Bill Leonard	WT - Time
DL - L.I.Press	BL - New Leader-WEVD	MP - Park East

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51	PROS: 19	Con: DH DP WGN WWM BL WC WNY None: DWJ WN WNR WSR
GIGI-11/24/51	PROS: 18	Con: DT DM DC DP DW WWM BL WCM WCU WNR WSR None: WT
GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50	PROS: 29	None: WNS
I AM A CAMERA-11/28/51	PROS: 22	Con: DN DC DJ BL WCM WN WNR So-So: DT
THE KING AND I-3/29/51	PROS: 29	Con: WN
THE MALE ANIMAL-4/30/52	PROS: 21	None: WGN WWM WC WN WNR WNSWSR WT MP
THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51	PROS: 26	Con: WCD WGN None: WN WT MP
MRS. McTHING-2/20/52	PROS: 20	DM DJ WGN BC BL WNY WSR WT None: WNR MP
PAINT YOUR WAGON-11/10/51	PROS: 21	Con: DH DP DJ WV WWM BC WC None: WNR WNS WSR
PAL JOEY-1/3/52	PROS: 28	Con: BL None: WNR
POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/51	PROS: 25	Con: DW BL WN WNR WT
THE SHRIKE-1/15/52	PROS: 25	Con: DW WCD WGN BL WN
SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49	PROS: 29	Con: WT
STALAG 17-5/8/51	PROS: 22	Con: DM WCD BL WCU WN WNY So-So: DN
THREE WISHES FOR JAMIE-3/21/52	PROS: 18	Con: DT DP DJ BC WCM WCU WSR None: WWM WN WNR MP
TOP BANANA-11/1/51	PROS: 23	Con: DP DJ BL None: WN WNR WSR

' Off Broadway '

Acres of Sky, new ballad opera by Zoe Land Schiller and Arthur Kroutz, presented by Columbia Theatre Associates...Once Upon A Midnight, musical drama based on life and works of Edgar Allan Poe, presented at Fordham University Theatre...Originals Only playing revue Variety Showcase on week ends, continuing A Bed of Neurosis during early part of week...Amato Opera Theatre has presented its 100th free week end opera performance, Spring and Summer schedule will feature Marriage of Figaro, Magic Flute and Don Giovanni...Danger Signal, featuring eight year old Barbara Karen was presented at Amato Opera Theatre...Theatre De Lys will present Trudy Goth and her Choreographers' Workshop in a series of Sunday night dance recitals next fall...Circle in the Square presented Maye Deren dance recital...Living Theatre presented two concerts of work of Alan Hovhatness...Summer and Smoke at Circle in the Square, proving to be Group's most successful production from box office standpoint. Atkinson, Times, devoted Sunday piece to it, in addition to his original rave review.

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' Green Room Department '

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CITY CENTER FUTURE...Genuine and quick reorganization of the administrative pattern of the NY City Center demanded by Herald Tribune editorial. To assure the Center's future it is necessary that changes be made in the board of directors. Internal bickerings of the past year, with summary dismissal of Laszlo Halasz and highlighted by resignation from board of Howard Cullman, used energies which might have been put at the service of the public.

CRITIC SOLUTIONS...Everlasting problem of what to do with the critic considered by two reviewers who come up with diverse solutions. Coleman, Mirror, reminds playgoers that they actually have it in their power to oust any reviewer they feel incompetent, etc. Brown, SRL, has a less drastic solution which might work, he admits, in an ideal world. Reviews, in his scheme, would be read AFTER the theatre fan has seen a given play. Picking a play to see would come from skimming a few notices, talking to friends who had seen it, and from finding out what the play promises. Reviews would then be read for themselves as interesting reading, and would not have a life and death hold on theatre.

ONSTAGE IDEAS...Hook 'N Ladder producers, who didn't risk a second night, might have run some of the funnier notices onstage, suggested Kenneth Banghart, NBC Critic at Large...$250,000 in cash onstage might make a more interesting production than the musical the money would buy, offers Joseph Buloff, Mrs. McThing director, at recent ANTA directors forum.

ANTI COUNCIL FILM...First negative opinion on Council of Living Theatre's sponsorship of "Main Street to Broadway" film offered by Coleman, Mirror. Reviewer thinks personal appearances, better road productions, and lectures by theatre men would be more useful in raising interest of theatre outside of New York. Idea of film seems condescending.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Mrs. McThing deserved the Pulitzer Prize, commented Chapman, News before the award was announced...Olivia de Havilland's third try at New York next season in Portrait of a Lady may bring her nearer to her mark, optimistically hopes Kerr, Herald Tribune...While George Jean Nathan advises the movie star to stick to Hollywood.

BROADWAY TV THEATRE...Though drama critics have avoided discussing WOR TV program which gives full length productions of same play five nights a week, the TV reviewers seem to feel the program is improving. Production of The Jazz Singer termed program's best by Bundy, Billboard. Others found script dated, but production fine. Likewise preceding Three Men on a Horse production received better notices than opener The Trial of Mary Dugan.

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' Theatre News Round Up '

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"Drama Desk" elections to be held at May meeting...The Shrike won Pulitzer Prize ...Barter Theatre auditions won by Sylvia Short, Concord, Mass, and Charles Quinlivan Roselle, NJ, picked by Cornelia Otis Skinner..."Talent '52" Stage Managers Club show May 12th at 46th Street Theatre...Kim Stanley chosen best supporting player of year by "Outer Circle."...Drama League of New York medal to Julie Harris...Graduate English theses on Atkinson, Times, Brown, SRL, and George Jean Nathan, included in current projects reported by Educational Theatre Journal...Stalag 17 celebrates its first year on Broadway, to go on tour in June...Total net profit of two productions of South Pacific reaches three million dollar mark...Sol Hurok to bring Jean Louis Barrault French theatre company to U.S. in fall.

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' Theatre Symposium at Columbia '

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Creative role American colleges can play in developing theatre interest and workers considered by participants in theatre symposium sponsored by Graduate English Society of Columbia University, given at Harkness Theatre. Audrey Wood, play agent, Theresa Helburn, producer, Lee Strasberg, director and Howard Bay, designer, had diverse views on this and other subjects. Joseph Wood Krutch, Nation critic and professor of drama at Columbia, moderated.

Each university should appoint two or three resident playwrights yearly, Miss Wood suggested as a solution to the dearth of new scripts. While she is ready to admit the current season was a "bad" one, she looks upon it merely as an "ugly intermission." Judging from the high caliber of some of the work of the past few years, the play agent is sure some fine new plays and playwrights will appear. The Leibling-Wood office, of which she is a co-partner, markets each script individually. Her sales approach, she revealed, is a sort of negative selling method in which she tries to convince the producer she has a fine script but that it isn't just right for his talents. Usually the producer demands to see the script.

Playwrights must spend more time working on their plays before submitting them for production, Miss Helburn explained. "Theatre Guild" co-producer feels that today theatre is a by-product of the entertainment field. Because no one could accuse it of being a business, it must be considered as an art or craft. It is possible we may get to the place where the only way to get the kind of theatre we want is by some sort of endowment, she suggested. Miss Helburn doesn't encourage anyone to go into the theatre as a profession if he can help it. But, she added, optimistically, there are always plenty of people ready to go into it.

Theatre activity isn't as accidental as it seems, Mr. Strasberg contended in pointing out that of current top ten playwrights. Most were encouraged by belonging to active theatre groups. Answer to continuing problems of theatre seems to be in organized theatre set up on a permanent basis. If the interest is developed to foster the creative aspects of the theatre, the actor and the author will responde in kind. The theatre must get back to where it is an art or craft with an honorable tradition. Endowments may be one answer to setting up such organizations, he said.

Utopian concepts of endowments and subsidies are merely idle daydreaming in the opinion of Mr. Bay. Instead, theatre people must think of ways to encourage a more vital theatre within the one show economy. As far as his own craft goes, the U.S. is millions of years behind what the designers could do in a creative and imaginative way. Theatre today has been scaled down to a certain pettiness because the producers who used to be creative, now must devote full time to fund raising.

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' Legit Stuff '

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Gigi and The Moon Is Blue extending time which telephone reservations may be picked up until 2:15 PM and 7:15 PM...Show of the Month moved to 136 West 44th Street ...Brooks Costume Company to move to 3 West 61st Street...Theatre Costume Designers Association display at ANTA Playhouse...."Critics' Choice", TV show being offered networks will feature material selected by panel of drama critics including Brown,SRL, Kronenberger,Time, Chapman,News...Cornelia Otis Skinner may present series of programs on CBS Radio next fall similiar to her Paris 90...Long distance reviewing record coped by Morehouse,WT&S, who files his notice on Olivia de Havilland's Candida from Calcutta,India by noting that "Off Broadway" production of local drama club was better than the Candida he saw in Providence,R.I.